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‘JUNE, 1972 & A CHIEF WHO DOES NOT COMMAND:’ CLASTRES/DELEUZE/GUATTARI

GENERICSCIENCE DELEUZE/GUATTARI, NOMADISM, PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES, STATE

(part I of an on going research project on political anthropology, D&G, Clastres, etc.)

“Primitive society has always been considered a place of absolute difference in relation to western society, a strange and unthinkable space of absence – absence of all that constitutes the observers’ socio-cultural universe: a world without hierarchy, people who obey no one, a society indifferent to possession of wealth, chiefs who do not command, cultures without morals for they are unaware of sin, classless societies, societies without a State, etc. In short, what the writings of ancient travelers or modern scholars constantly cry out and yet never manage to say in that primitive society is, in its being, undivided.” – Pierre Clastres, ‘Archaeology of Violence: War in Primitive Societies’ p. 259

/0/. ‘The Permanent Exercise of the Decolonization of Thought’

In June of 1972, Pierre Clastres participated in a roundtable discussion on *Anti-Oedipus*, where Deleuze and Guattari were present as respondents. After a long period of questions and criticisms from other participants (through which Clastres remained silent) he interrupted the conversation with this striking claim: “Deleuze and Guattari have written about Savages and Barbarians what ethnologists up to now have not” (*Desert Islands*, p.226). Now, given the ethos of the French philosophical scene at this time such laudatory remarks tend to suggest a tinge of irony if not a complete lack of seriousness (cf. Foucault’s comment that perhaps, one day, the century will be called Deleuzean). However, if there is something serious intended by this claim it is due to a shared assumption by Clastres and D&G; namely, and to borrow its formulation from the Deleuzean anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, true philosophical and anthropological thinking must become a “permanent exercise in the decolonization of thought” (*Cannibal Metaphysics*, p. 48).

For Clastres, this means acknowledging and addressing the covert forms of eurocentrism that persist within the epistemic framework of anthropology. Thus, what was signaled by the remark with which we began is something like the truth of the socio-political embeddedness of the knowing-subject: it is the ethnographer’s and anthropologist’s subject matter that obliges them to enter into a relation with that ‘unthinkable space of absence’; the absence of all those social cues and normative values that render European social life as an intelligible and lived reality. If the ethnographer can successfully excise these dogmatic

presuppositions, as Clastres thinks is possible and as we will see below, they wouldn't merely benefit from a certain level of epistemic certainty about their subject matter. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, one would understand the positive reason for why certain societies are without States: namely, that non-State societies have intentionally constructed an entire way of living that is antithetical to State capture. In Clastres' words, they are *societies against the State*.

For Deleuze (with and without Guattari) we see a similar notion as early as *Difference and Repetition* regarding the nature of 'social Ideas' and constructing a Thought that is adequate to Ideas themselves: "In short, the economic is...the totality of the problems posed to a given society. In all rigour, there are only economic social problems, even though the solutions may be juridical, political, or ideological, and the problems may be expressed in these fields of resolvability...Not that the observer can draw the least optimism from this, for these 'solutions', may involve stupidity or cruelty, the horror of war or 'the solution of the Jewish problem'." (DR, 186)

For Clastres, as with Deleuze and Guattari, attaining a Thought that is adequate to its Idea does not guarantee the moral virtue, or constitute the innocence and objectivity, of the thinker: the Idea may clarify the various fields of resolution to the economic problem but the Idea does not legislate its outcomes due to some innate moralizing logic of establishing an equivalence between a problem and its resolution. Thus, in order to understand the points of convergence between these thinkers we'll begin with an explication of Clastres' analysis of the function of war and violence in what he calls 'Primitive' societies. Then, we will turn to D&G's Nomadology chapter in order to see how Clastres' ideas inform their understanding of the nomadic war machine and the State. Finally, we will conclude by showing how D&G extend and modify Clastres' initial insights on the relationship between the war machine, the State, and the modification of this relationship effectuated by capitalism.

/1/. War Is 'The Pure and Social Form of Violence'

In order to address the limits and errors of anthropology, Pierre Clastres resurrects the question of the role of the violence of warfare in non-State societies. For Clastres, the question of war has marked the internal limit of various anthropological accounts – where this limit is constituted by the inability to understand warfare from the perspective of non-State groups. Thus, war in societies without a State has continuously been 'accounted for' by its reduction to something other than itself: whether as a mere doubling of biological aggression, as the struggle over the scarcity of resources, or as the symptom of an unsuccessful transaction between two different social formations. These three ways of understanding war in 'primitive' societies are categorized under the headings of a **naturalist**, **evolutionist**, and **exchangist** framework.

The Naturalist interpretation accounts for violence/war by reducing its social manifestations to biological necessity: humans are naturally aggressive and in pre-state societies the use of violence is a means for the survival of hunter-gatherers (the hunter does violence, and kills, the hunted animal). The problem here is that war, then, is seen as the mere double of the necessary violence of the hunter. So war, if it is this very same violence, is the hunting of other humans with the aim of satisfying hunger. However, says Clastres, even the phenomena of cannibalism isn't sufficiently explained by this naturalist framework since it would be easier in the life of non-state societies to hunt non-human animals. **The Economist** interpretation accounts for violence/war by interpreting war as indicative of the poverty of 'primitive' life; where, due to the underdevelopment of the productive forces (e.g., the lack of technological means for things such as agriculture), war is fought over the scarcity of resources. The Economist position asserts a metaphysical economy of scarcity as the natural precondition of non-state social life. For Clastres, this idea appears to be disproven by the research of Marshall Sahlins whose field work proposes that life in pre-state societies was actually predicated on an economy of an abundance of resources; where the majority of time is understood as leisure-time since the labor-time is reduced to a minimum. **The Exchangist** framework, which is developed above, is attributed to Lévi-Strauss's thesis that "exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions."

While each account of war is historically significant for Clastres, it is the exchangist framework of Lévi-Strauss that is given the closest treatment since it is via structural anthropology that we are closest to, and yet farthest from, alleviating ourselves of the eurocentric horizon of anthropological study. Thus, Clastres cites the following passage from the *Elementary Structures of Kinship* as emblematic of this exchangist perspective: "...in Lévi-Strauss's great sociological work, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, at the end of one of the most important chapters, 'The Principle of Reciprocity': [Lévi-Strauss writes] 'There is a link, a continuity, between hostile relations and the provision of reciprocal prestations: exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions.'" (*Archaeology of Violence*, 252-3).

Thus, according to Lévi-Strauss, war in pre-State societies is what happens when the diplomatic exchange between autonomous social groups fails. However, says Clastres, Lévi-Strauss's assertion that exchange is logically prior to war cannot obtain for two main reasons. First, drawing on the work of anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, exchange does not precede war in pre-State societies due to Sahlins' discovery that the true economic structure of non-state societies was predicated on an abundance of natural resources. Given this economic relationship between non-state societies and their territorial milieu the logical relationship between exchange and violence appears as suspicious; if for no other reason than the unquestioned assumptions Clastres finds at the heart of the the exchangist hypothesis: "One would assume, all things being equal for all local groups, a general absence of violence: it could only arise in rare cases of territorial violation; it would only be defensive, and thus never produce itself, each group relying on its own territory which it has no reason to leave." (AV, 258).

Thus, Clastres wonders, what motivates the exchange among social groups when each group, due to abundance and surplus, is

materially and economically self-sufficient? That is, how can Lévi-Strauss posit the logical priority of exchange over war if exchange appears as superfluous from the perspective of each social groups relative autonomy and natural condition of affluence? It is for this reason, says Clastres, that we need to understand that it is not exchange that explains war, but it is war that gives rise to exchange among different non-State social groups. In other words, war is not the negative side of the positive determinations of non-State societies. Rather, *war constitutes one of the fundamental and positive features of non-State societies as such*. If war is given logical priority over exchange it is not simply because war comes before peace; rather, war is given logical priority due to the autonomous, autarkic, and self-sufficient desire of societies without a State. As Clastres writes

"At its actual level of existence...primitive society presents two essential sociological properties that touch upon its very being: the social being that determines the reason for being and the principle of the intelligibility of war. The primitive community is at once a totality and a unity. A totality in that it is a complete, autonomous, whole ensemble, ceaselessly attentive to preserving its autonomy: a society in the full sense of the word. A unity in that its homogenous being continues to refuse social division, to exclude inequality, to forbid alienation. Primitive society is a single totality in that the principle of its unity is not exterior to it: it does not allow any configuration of One to detach itself from the social body in order to represent it, in order to embody it as unity. This is why the criterion of non-division is fundamentally political: if the savage chief is powerless, it is because society does not accept power separated from its being, division, established between those who command and those who obey" (AV, 261).

What gives non-State societies their 'reason for being' is simultaneously the relative abundance of nature and the political aim of the autonomous self-determination of each social group for-themselves. Thus, we encounter an economic and political reason for constructing a society without a State: not only is non-State society self-sufficient economically but it is also self-determinant politically. Implicit in Clastres' analysis is not only the necessary corrective to the eurocentric practices of anthropology and ethnography (i.e., societies without a State are not in some state of nature but are social wholes that attain a certain degree of economic and political autonomy); in addition, implied here is the existence of a socio-political intentionality on the part of non-State social formations. It is not enough to say the nomads lacks a State, and thus lack civilization. What Clastres shows us is that the nomad finds nothing of value in becoming assimilated into the State apparatus itself; and this lack of value attributed to assimilation from the perspective of non-State social groups is, in itself, a socio-political prescription. Hence Clastres' well known formula of non-State societies as not simply being without a State; rather, they are social wholes fundamentally *against the State*. Thus, one of the fundamental features of non-State societies; one of their positive definitions; is the intentional organization of a society that seeks to ward off the State.

/2/. Societies Against The State

So what does this mean for war as the other positive determination of societies against the State? Given what has been said, war must now be understood as the social and political mechanism by which each autonomous social group ensures its autonomy relative to all neighboring groups. When Clastres characterizes war in non-State societies as the 'pure and social form of violence' we must understand two things: the function of war, as pure form of violence, is oriented toward the continuous guarantee of each social groups autonomy and self-determination relative to all other groups. War, in its pure form, is never something embarked upon for-itself or for the purposes of simply eliminating a rival group; war is not the object of nomadic society. Rather, it is the means by which the autarkic principle (the true object of nomadic society) is preserved at each step of the way. War, as the social form of violence, responds to the problems we encountered with Lévi-Strauss's exchange account. If war in its pure form is understood to be the means to secure the political desire for autonomy respective to all rivaling non-State groups, *war in its social form is the cause of, or the sufficient reason for, exchange to take place*. Why? Because, says Clastres, one never wages war without acquiring the means for a successful campaign. For non-State societies the means for success are not simply economic or technological; rather, each social group

"is resigned to alliance because it would be too dangerous to engage in military operations alone, and that, if one could, one would gladly do without allies who are never absolutely reliable. There is, as a result, an essential property of international life in primitive society: war relates first to alliance; war as an institution determines alliance as a tactic [...] We see now that seeking an alliance depends on actual war: there is sociological priority of war over alliance. Here, the true relationship between exchange and war emerges. Indeed, where are relations of exchange established, which socio-political units assume a principle of reciprocity? These are precisely the groups implicated in the networks of alliance; exchange partners are allies, the sphere of exchange is that of alliance. This does not mean, of course that were it not for alliance, there would no longer be exchange; exchange would simply find itself circumscribed within the space of the autonomous community at the heart of which it never ceases to operate; it would be strictly intra-communal. Thus, one exchanges with allies; there is exchange, because there is alliance" (AV, 267).

War as 'the pure and social form of violence' is finally revealed as it exists within non-State societies: as the means by which each rival group ensures their relative autonomy from all other groups and as the basis on which alliances are formed and exchanges made. Thus Clastres writes, and in a manner reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari, that to understand the function of war and violence in non-State societies necessarily means to understand that "[A]s long as there is war, there is autonomy: this is why war cannot cease, why it must not cease, why it is permanent...the logic of primitive society is a centrifugal logic, a logic of the multiple. The Savages want the multiplication of the multiple" (AV, 274). At this point it is worth recalling Deleuze and Guattari's

own attempt to properly pose the question of what defines the nomad/nomadic existence in-itself: "The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths...But the question is what in nomad life is a **principle** and what is only a **consequence**" (ATP, 380). **War is the principle** on which nomadic life is predicated; of life in societies against the State; **and exchange is merely the consequence** of the tactical alliances established in this permanent war of 'multiplying the multiple', or of ensuring the relative autarky of nomadic social groups as such. And in line with Clastres' positive determination of war in non-State societies, Deleuze and Guattari write, "Primitive war does not produce the State any more than it derives from it. And it is no better explained by exchange than by the State...war is what limits exchange, maintains them in the framework of "*alliances*"; it is what prevents them from becoming a State factor, from fusing groups" (ATP, 358).

In contrast to the nomadic war machine of societies against the State, and for Deleuze and Guattari, the State 'captures' nomadic life; the State is the reorganization of the political and economic relations of nomadic society and transforms the nomad into an organ for aims established by the State-as-Organism. Thus, States capture the nomads in order to transform them into an organ of power and exploit the nomad-as-organ for the ends of the preservation of State based sovereignty. And it is on the basis of these contrasting features of non-State and State societies that we can understand Deleuze and Guattari's remark from the Faciality chapter regarding the role of racism in the construction of the European nation-state: "European racism as the white man's claim has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other: it is instead primitive societies that the stranger is grasped as an "Other"...From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be" (ATP, 178).

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